



NOAA Fisheries' Proposed Strategy to Reduce Ship Strikes of North Atlantic Right Whales – Shipping Industry Dialog

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Objectives for Today

- Discuss Strategy Objective: *Reduce Threat of Ship Strikes of Right Whales while Minimizing Adverse Impacts on Ports and Shipping Industry*
- *We will briefly describe:*
 - The Bind: North Atlantic right whale lack of recovery
 - our process, the considerations we made
 - basic elements of the plan
- *Solicit your comment and input*

We seek a dialog. What have we overlooked? Can the plan be improved while still providing maximum protection for the species and causing minimum economic impact?

The Depleted North Atlantic Right Whale – The Bind We Are In

- severely depleted by commercial whaling
- little or no recovery in the decades since protection from whaling – pop'n may actually be declining (Caswell et al. 1999)
- Current official population estimate: ~300 individuals
- long-lived; slow reproducing – few offspring: one calf/3-6 yrs
- reproduction erratic
- known death and injury from human activities -- *likely seeing a minimum, likely many more go undetected*
 - fishing activities
 - vessel traffic
 - *accounts for more known right whale deaths than any other human activity*
- loss of a even single individual impacts recovery

Statutory Responsibilities/Authorities

Endangered Species Act

- Prohibitions against “take”
- Recovery plans for listed species
- ESA section 7 consultations



→ *“take” = to harass, hunt, capture, or kill*

→ *NMFS Biol. Opin.: the death of a single right whale poses jeopardy to the continued existence of the species*

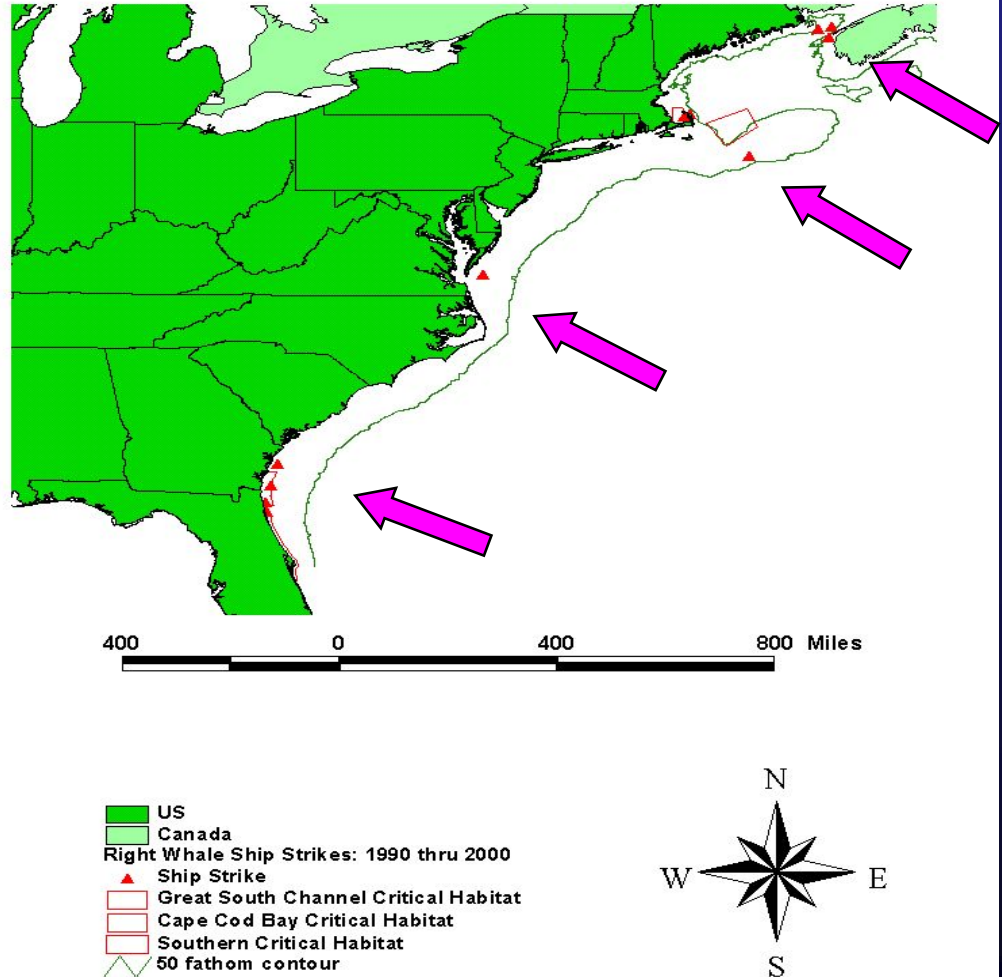
Marine Mammal Protection Act

- Prohibitions against “take”
- Limits how many individuals can be removed from a population

→ *therefore, no take is permitted under either the ESA or MMPA*

Ship strikes
occur along
entire U.S.
east coast

Ship Strikes During 1990-2000: North Atlantic Right Whales



Concerns of the U.S. Public

- Congress
 - Recognizes the problem of ship strikes
 - Has provided annual increase in appropriations to reduce human impacts to right whale, major portion devoted to addressing ship strikes
- Fishing Industry
 - being regulated to reduce threat of fishing gear
 - entanglement addressed via Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP)
 - views ship strikes as the big problem re: recovery
- Environmental/Conservation Groups
 - acutely aware of the problem
 - possible lawsuits

Strategy Objective

A comprehensive, long-term, range-wide Strategy to reduce ship strikes of right whales while also minimizing adverse impacts to ports and shipping industry.



Developing NOAA's Strategy -- Approach Taken

- *Wide range* of options identified -- 100+ measures carefully considered -- from “do nothing” to “no ships”
- Used best available data: whales and ships
- Guiding Principles:
 - Limit potential economic impact as much as possible
 - Tightly bound in time and space
 - Port parity/equity
 - Predictability over unpredictability to facilitate voyage planning

Developing NOAA's Strategy

- Data Used:
 - Vessel traffic information
 - 30+ years of whale survey data
 - Whale mortality data
 - Tagging and modeling research
 - Economic Studies
 - 2001 report identifying management options
 - Early feedback from other agencies
 - Industry liaisons, biologists, key contacts
 - Recovery Plan Implementation Teams

Elements of the Strategy

1. Continue ongoing ship strikes reduction measures
2. Implement education & outreach programs
3. Conservation Agreement with Canada
4. Federal agency consultations under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act to address operations of sovereign immune vessels
5. New operational measures for all vessels 65' and greater such as routing measures and speed restrictions

Elements of the Strategy

Technologies to Reduce Ship Strikes

- Moving Whales
 - alarm devices
- Moving Ships
 - passive acoustics (e.g., pop-up buoys)
 - active acoustics (e.g., SONAR)
 - predictive modeling
 - sonic tags
 - Other types (e.g., radar, infrared, synthetic aperture, satellite imagery)
 - Tagging

Nonetheless, a number of studies are being funded... See, also, “Technology” white paper...



Elements of the Strategy

5. *Operational Measures*

All vessels 65' and greater

- Routing measures
 - Minimizes confluence between whales and ships
- Speed restrictions
 - Considered *only* when no other measures possible
 - Exact speed to be determined: probably 10-14 knots
- Dynamically managed areas
 - All areas within U.S. Atlantic EEZ
 - Precautionary area established for limited time around

Strategy Overview—All Regions

- Objectives
 - Minimize ship strike threat to right whales
 - Minimize adverse impacts on ships and ports
- Defined tightly, temporally and spatially
- Based on all available data
- Based on input from shipping industry
- Applicable to vessels ≥ 65 ft
- Sovereign immune vessels exempt – to address operations of sovereign immune vessels

Current Implementation Actions

- ANPR comment period = 1 June 1- 15 Nov 2004
- Public and stakeholder meetings in summer/fall 2004; public comment/dialog
- Initiating NEPA process
- Partnering with USCG on Port Access Route Studies
- Fall/winter 2004/05: NMFS considers comments, modifies strategy
- Proposed Rule(s) – public comment
- Final Rule

Whale Avoidance/Ship Strike Reduction Web Site

<http://www.nero.noaa.gov/shipstrike>

http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/

